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THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE: TOTAL FORCE FOUNDATION OR ENDURING FALLACY?

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## ABSTRACT

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The Laird Total Force policy, referred to informally as the “Abrams Doctrine,” has just exceeded thirty years as a fundamental aspect of Department of Defense force structure and manning policy. The Abrams Doctrine was principally driven by force structure considerations and constraints that General Abrams faced in the post-Vietnam era; General Abrams’ actual intention in advocating this policy was an attempt both to save force structure and to resource the Reserve Component forces appropriately.

Despite this fact, the two perceptions most often associated with the Total Force policy today are: the necessity of gaining popular support in committing U.S. forces to combat, and a hidden intent of the AC-RC force structure to limit presidential powers. Both of these perceptions were adopted by various constituencies *after the fact*, and are actually fallacies. At the same time, a third function - that of limiting prolonged combat - *is* a desired associated outcome.

In December 2002, following the successful completion of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Secretary of Defense stated that the Total Force policy (e.g., the existing Active Component/Reserve Component force balance) was “hampering his ability to deploy forces” and suggested that he would seek changes. Secretary Rumsfeld is correct that some aspects of the Abrams Doctrine should be discarded, but it is important that the essential core should be retained in formulating a new Total Force policy. The original Abrams Doctrine was a landmark compromise marked by each constituency achieving some victories, accepting some losses, and the nation benefiting. The spirit of compromise that resulted in the first Abrams Doctrine must guide the development and serve as the enduring foundation for any future “Abrams” Doctrine. Any new “Abrams” Doctrine must arrive at a force structure appropriate to today’s threat while ensuring the continued relevance of the Reserve Component. At the same time, a new “Abrams” Doctrine must continue to perform the “conflict limiting” function that it now provides.



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It also is said that behind every successful man stands a truly incredible woman. It would follow then, that behind a man of modest talent who has achieved some modicum of success stands a woman of even greater accomplishments. My wife, Karen is that woman, and without her love and support and that of our sons, Patrick and Matthew, the effort reflected on these pages and indeed throughout my entire service in the military would not be possible.





## THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE: TOTAL FORCE FOUNDATION OR ENDURING FALLACY?

In December 2002, following the successful completion of Operation Enduring Freedom, the Secretary of Defense stated that the Total Force policy (e.g., Active Component/Reserve Component force balance) was “hampering his ability to deploy forces” and suggested that he would seek changes.<sup>1</sup> The primary issue was the necessity of activating specific capabilities in the Reserve Component (RC) force to enable the Active Component (AC) force to conduct combat operations. Structurally, AC forces cannot deploy to combat without activating key RC capabilities, a sometimes cumbersome and usually politically overt act. Following a similarly frustrating experience in subsequent planning and execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Mr. Rumsfeld issued a memorandum on 9 July 2003 requesting review of the composition of the Active and Reserve Components.

Addressed to the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Under Secretaries of Defense, the memorandum tasked them to review the force with a view towards: structuring to reduce the need for involuntary mobilization during the first fifteen days of a rapid response operation (or for any alerts to mobilize prior to the operation); structuring to limit involuntary mobilization to not more than one every six years; establishing a more rigorous process for reviewing joint requirements to ensure force structure is designed appropriately; validating requests for forces to provide timely notice of mobilization, and making mobilization and demobilization more efficient.<sup>2</sup> Although much of the requested review deals with RC mobilization procedures, the request to structure each component (e.g., Active Component and Reserve Component) to “reduce the need for involuntary mobilization” caused quite a stir in the RC community.<sup>3</sup> Although the primary intent of this proposed rebalancing is purportedly to allow for quicker response times in regards to international crises, Reserve Component advocates see it as a threat to the foundations of the Laird Total Force policy and commensurately as a threat to their relevance, resourcing, and recruitment and retention.<sup>4</sup>

The Laird Total Force policy, referred to informally as the “Abrams Doctrine,” has just exceeded thirty years as a fundamental aspect of Department of Defense force structure and manning policy. During this period it became institutionalized in doctrine and accepted as a virtually unquestioned foundation of the AC-RC balance of forces.<sup>5</sup> The Abrams Doctrine was principally driven by force structure considerations and constraints faced in the post-Vietnam era; General Abrams’ actual intention in advocating this policy was an attempt both to save force structure and to resource the Reserve Component forces appropriately.

Despite this fact, the two perceptions most often associated with the Abrams Doctrine today are: a necessity of gaining popular support when committing U.S. forces to combat, and a hidden intent to limit presidential powers. The necessity of gaining popular support perception is manifested in two interrelated beliefs: that it is necessary to mobilize the reserves in order to retain popular support for military action; and conversely, that the President must obtain popular support *before* mobilizing the reserves. The second perception is that the Total Force policy was designed expressly with “malice aforethought” to limit the powers of the President.<sup>6</sup> Both of these perceptions were adopted by various constituencies *after the fact*, and are actually fallacies. At the same time, a third function - that of limiting prolonged combat - is a desired associated outcome.

Secretary Rumsfeld is correct that some aspects of the Abrams Doctrine should be discarded, but it is important that the essential core should be retained in formulating a new Total Force policy. Any new “Abrams” Doctrine must arrive at a force structure appropriate to today’s threat while ensuring the continued relevance of the Reserve Component. At the same time, any new “Abrams” Doctrine must continue to perform the “conflict limiting” function that it now provides.

#### ARRIVING AT THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE: THE INTENT

The principle architect of the Army’s portion of the Total Force policy that evolved from the nation’s Vietnam experience was General Creighton W. Abrams, the Army Chief of Staff from 1972-1974.<sup>7</sup> His tour of duty coincided with several separate political forces that allowed him to shape the post-war Army to match his vision of the desirable future force. These political forces were both international and domestic, and together provided Abrams with a near-perfect window of opportunity to achieve his vision.

Internationally, the United States was seeking support from its allies to share the continuing burden of containing the Soviets - especially on the ground in Central Europe. Coincidentally, the economic and political recovery of Western Europe made it more practical for NATO member countries to assume a larger portion of the alliance’s defense, especially in areas related to Host Nation Support (HNS).<sup>8</sup> Additional HNS capabilities for traditional military police duties, transportation support requirements, and general rear area roles could facilitate a reduction of AC combat service (CS) and combat service support (CSS) units without a loss of overall capability at the onset of hostilities. For Abrams, additional HNS translated to the total number of U.S. soldiers in Europe remaining constant, while the number of combat units could

be expanded as personnel spaces previously required for U.S. CS and CSS forces could now be allocated to the combat forces.

Domestically, legislative pressure to reduce the size of the Active Component force and to reinvigorate the role of the Reserve Components was also gaining traction following Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Budgetary reductions, together with the increased costs of fielding an all-volunteer army and a predictable post-war pressure to reduce the size of the military seemed to justify cutting the active duty force structure. Abrams, however, thought that a reduction of the active duty forces was the last thing the Army needed as it shifted its focus back to the Soviet threat. Fortunately, newly appointed Secretary of the Defense James Schlesinger agreed to resist pressures to downsize the Army and even to expand the number of combat divisions *provided* Abrams did not raise the total end strength of the Active Component. Significantly, these two key participants also agreed that the Army's reserve forces would again be resourced and trained in conjunction and coordination with the active forces.<sup>10</sup>

This led to the formulation of the "Round Out" concept, which aligned RC combat and CS/CSS elements with AC divisional combat units and thereby preserved AC manpower spaces for expanding the combat forces. Coupled with personnel space savings due to HNS overseas, this innovative augmentation concept allowed Abrams to carve out three more division headquarters and their associated combat elements from the current end strength.<sup>11</sup>

General Abrams' recommended solution to the seemingly divergent requirements of the AC and RC constituencies was both simple and brilliant. He expanded the AC structure to provide for more combat divisions by relying on RC forces to provide unit-level fill. This allowed him to expand and then maintain the combat strength of the active Army at sixteen divisions and also tied resource commitments for those specific "round-out" reserve force units to their AC brethren's levels.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, he moved the remaining bulk of the Army's combat support and combat service support units into the RC, relying on alliance members for such support before reserve forces arrived for the most likely contingency (Europe). Again, this approach pledged to resource these particular RC forces at levels appropriate to their deployment timelines.

There was, however, a "catch" associated with Abrams' approach. Together, all these actions meant that to fight any type of lengthy or serious conflict with AC forces, especially outside of Europe, the president must call up the CS/CSS assets of the RC. As an example, transportation terminal brigades and battalions needed to provide military interface at commercial seaports of embarkation, deployment support brigades to assist with loading the equipment on commercial transportation, and port security companies to provide security at

military ocean terminals were moved into the RC structure.<sup>13</sup> Since upwards of ninety-five percent of the Army deploys to large scale contingency operations by sea, these deployment support units must be mobilized early to support the movement of the AC heavy combat forces.<sup>14</sup>

Despite assertions to the contrary, General Creighton Abrams' motivation primarily to preserve a large regular army should not be a matter of historical debate.

Facing a significant drawdown, the shift to an all-volunteer armed force, and a desire for ethical reform from the rank and file of an officer corps who believed the Vietnam war had weakened service integrity, Abrams' primary goals were to establish an active force structure that maintained 16 division flags while increasing the readiness of the reserve components.<sup>15</sup>

Retaining, even increasing, divisions was more important than any other consideration for Abrams. Divisions were the accepted metric for discussing, and opposing, the similarly constructed Soviet threat in Europe at that time. To achieve the number of divisions in the structure he desired, Abrams had to reinvigorate the RC forces. This was a realistic as well as a political necessity based on the domestic environment.

Abrams second intended outcome of the Total Force policy was for selected elements of the RC to be resourced in a manner commensurate with and in consonance with the AC. The Cold War forced the Army's components into a symbiotic relationship:

The Cold War was partly responsible for this increased reliance because the Soviet threat appeared overwhelming and the cost of maintaining large Active forces was prohibitive.<sup>16</sup>

The unquestioned directness of the Soviet threat provided relevance and a focus that was difficult to deny. By tying the Active Components' ability to meet and defeat this threat to the Reserve Components' resources, the Abrams Doctrine provided RC units a mission focus that imparted credibility to their resource arguments and enabled the successful execution of their retention and recruitment efforts. The Abrams Doctrine provided Reserve Component relevancy, and it is from such relevancy that the remaining three "Rs" draw their support.<sup>17</sup> Relevancy is a fundamental necessity for the Reserve Components and a source of continuing debate in the post-Cold War era.

The Abrams Doctrine seemingly accomplished each constituency's most ardent desires. For Abrams and the AC, it allowed manning more pure combat formations, while keeping costs associated with a combat force this size relatively low. For the RC, it yielded relevance that provided political and bureaucratic leverage, promised access to resources, and resulted in retention and recruiting advantages. Thus, it was a commendable and politically crafted

compromise solution to structuring the force, which continued to operate long after the conditions that necessitated its inception had changed dramatically. Of course, as with many policies crafted by governments, there have been other unintended outcomes as well.

#### **THE POLITICS OF MEANING: THE ASSOCIATED PERCEPTIONS**

Although designed to address “programmatic” issues, the Abrams Doctrine has become associated with some significantly different perceptions over the intervening years. In fact, one of the disconcerting aspects of the Abrams Doctrine is that each of its constituencies has developed its own largely unchallenged interpretation of the policy over the years. Academics, largely buttressed by the arguments of authors such as Kohn, Sorley, Hoffman, and Cohen see the policy as a limit to Presidential powers. Some of these same authors and others, including many military officers, see it as an argument for obtaining popular support prior to mobilization. Still others, particularly members of the RC, and specifically the National Guard and its many supporters, have interpreted it as a necessary precursor to military action:

The Total Force policy of 1973 was designed to gain popular support for military operations from the American public by mobilizing the National Guard from its thousands of locations across the United States when needed.<sup>18</sup>

In popularizing this interpretation they have helped to legitimize this sentiment, and subsequently raised the linkage between mobilization and popular support to near canonical status. Likewise, the Abrams Doctrine is often associated, fairly or unfairly, with a supposedly subtle AC attempt to limit Presidential powers by promulgating the AC-RC interdependence that forms its heart.<sup>19</sup> Restrictive interpretations on American military interventions associated with both the Weinberger Doctrine and the Powell Doctrine allegedly have their lineage in the structural limitations conceived in the Abrams Doctrine.<sup>20</sup> Yet, curiously, nowhere in General Abrams’ contemporary papers nor in public statements made at that time is there any hint that either obtaining popular support or imposing incidental constraints on the powers on the Executive branch were intended outcomes of the new Total Force policy.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, each perception retains a significant number of adherents and therefore warrants a closer examination.

#### **MOBILIZATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO POPULAR SUPPORT**

Some direct linkage between mobilizing the reserves and committing and maintaining the will of the people in support of a war remains a generally accepted belief among many. Advocates of this linkage make either or both of two arguments: one, that mobilization of reserve forces results in obtaining or increasing popular support for an intended military action;

and, two, conversely, that you must first obtain the support of the people in order to mobilize the reserves. It is a somewhat confusing tautology. Theoretically, its roots are based on the writings of Prussian theorist Carl Von Clausewitz.

Clausewitz posits a remarkable trinity in war composed of primordial violence, hatred and enmity; the play of chance; and of the interaction of policy. Specifically, he states that these three aspects mainly concern the people, the commander and his army, and the government.<sup>22</sup> Clausewitz requires the leaders in war to keep these three “aspects” balanced so that policies pursued in regards to one are not undertaken without regard for their effects on the remaining two aspects. He admonishes governments for trying to go to war without the support of the people. The result of his own and Prussia’s experience in the Napoleonic wars, its application to a modern democratic government still warrants consideration. Although Clausewitz does not guarantee that the preparation and thoughtful orchestration of all three elements to draw forth and appropriately direct the maximum power of a nation will guarantee victory, he implies that failing to properly manage the relationship of the three would lead to losing the war.<sup>23</sup>

The Reserve Components, providing representation from numerous small communities across the country, are advertised as creating a mechanical linkage that integrates the key Clausewitzian trinity element of the people with the other two elements. Colonel Harry Summers’ book, *On Strategy, A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, presents a powerful argument that the United States government ignored the “remarkable trinity” (and other Clausewitzian theory) and suffered defeat in Vietnam as the will of the people drifted farther away from the policy of the government and the actions of its army. As Summers states, someone

...needed to tell him [the president] that it would be an obvious fallacy to commit the Army without first committing the American people. Such a commitment would require battlefield competence and clear-cut objectives to be sustained, but without the commitment of the American people the commitment of the Army to prolonged combat was impossible.<sup>24</sup>

In this belief, Colonel Summers is not alone. Other defense analysts and military leaders agree that President Johnson’s decision was fateful. In fact, it has become a common and oft-repeated rationale for the defeat in Vietnam.

The lesson learned by the American military in Vietnam involves the third leg of Clausewitz’s “remarkable trinity,” the people. The consensus, particularly acute among Army officers, seems to suggest that the American people have a duty and a role in the authorization of force, beyond that delegated to their elected representatives in Congress and the President. This conviction can be summed up by the statement that war is a shared responsibility between the people, the government, and the military.<sup>25</sup>

## DOES MOBILIZATION ENSURE POPULAR SUPPORT?

The objective of ensuring popular support for future wars was not contained in any of General Abrams' writings at the time that the Total Force policy was promulgated. Ensuring in the conceptual framework that the passions of the people became engaged and remained focused on the outcome of a conflict as a result of this structural forcing function apparently arose through interviews and writings much after the fact. Lewis Sorley was one of the first authors to discuss this objective in depth in his 1992 biography of Abrams. Colonel Summers does not cite specifically Abrams or the Abrams Doctrine in his book offering a Clausewitzian analysis of the Vietnam War, although he asserts that for most of our history the support of the American people was built into our very force structure.<sup>26</sup> He stresses the necessity of mobilizing the reserves by citing the theoretical basis of Clausewitz's remarkable trinity. However, some critics argue that Summers' application of the trinity is too broad in nature.

The concept of the "remarkable trinity" is a basis for the practical political-military analysis of particular wars, not a description of the social structures--which may alter over time--that support war.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless, the question remains: Is mobilization of the RC an effective methodology for ensuring support of the war effort? A review of mobilizing and deploying reserve forces since Vietnam indicates obtaining and maintaining popular support is predicated on a number of factors. In regards to the large mobilization prior to the Gulf War and its impact on garnering popular support, one author offers the following:

Although the public rallied behind President Bush in August when he announced the American military intervention, popular support for his Persian Gulf policies soon fell sharply. The mobilization of large numbers of guardsmen and reservists had no impact on that precipitous drop in public support. Opinion polls showed that the American people's support for Bush's Persian Gulf policy was not restored until U.S. forces began combat operations.<sup>28</sup>

A similar trend was observed during the air war over Kosovo. Popular support has more to do with the results than with the military components involved.

The truth is remarkably simple. When the U.S. achieves victory in a just cause, the public applauds the use of force. When it loses--worse, still, when America is defeated or runs away (as in Somalia or Vietnam)--the public reasonably says the use of the military was a mistake.<sup>29</sup>

In hindsight, the fact that the United States remained heavily engaged in Vietnam for nine years (with a belief that achieving victory was possible for at least six of those years) before



withdrawing seems to support this contention. Also in hindsight, it is now apparent that such conditional support is not particular to a democratic form of government. Gunther Lewy concluded in his review of Vietnam that a mixture of propaganda and compulsion offers a totalitarian regime an advantage in a war for limited objectives.<sup>30</sup> However, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan illustrates that any unsuccessful war that drags on for a long time loses the backing essential for its successful pursuit.<sup>31</sup>

A review of peacekeeping missions reveals similar results with respect to support and mobilization. Although his work focuses specifically on the influence of casualties on public policy, James Burk concludes from an examination of peacekeeping efforts in Lebanon and Somalia that public support was neither as unsteady nor as critically contingent on the absence of casualties as many have claimed.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly enough, Burk's conclusions are that public approval or disapproval for such missions is largely determined *before* casualties are incurred. He asserts that the political leadership is more responsible for popular support of military operations than other factors, based upon a study by Eric Larson that concludes public support for military deployments is influenced heavily by consensus (or its absence) among political leaders.<sup>33</sup> Author Max Boot concurs that the public is willing to "go along" if the elites in government and the media are united in favor of a mission.<sup>34</sup> Agreeing with both Larsen's and Boot's conclusions, I submit that the belief that activating the Reserve Component *ensures* the support of the people may be nothing more than a well-propagated myth.

#### TYING THE PRESIDENT'S HANDS?

A variant of the popular support argument is that the President *must* first gain the popular support of the people prior to initiating military operations. But frequently popular support cannot be a limiting factor, and to make such support a prerequisite for action would be to paralyze political leadership. Dr. Elliot Cohen summarizes:

As for explaining its failures or half-successes since World War II, even thoughtful general officers declared that to have victories, "You must have the political will--and that means the will of the administration, the congress, and the American people. All must be united in a desire for action." If accepted, such an extreme pre-condition--a unity that has escaped the United States in every major war except the World Wars--means that the civilians will always disappoint the military and the soldiers will always have an excuse.<sup>35</sup>

In the history of American arms, the support of the American people has been rarely guaranteed before hand, and certainly not guaranteed after the action begins. Were it a prerequisite to action, few if any military actions would have ever been undertaken by this or any other

democratic government. This is so in limited conflicts, in peacekeeping operations, or in “crusades.”

The quest to obtain popular support for military action cannot be tied to any single event; popular support cannot be guaranteed under most circumstances. There are too many variables in the extremely dynamic equation that determines the relationship of mobilization, Presidential decisions, and popular support to assign outcomes with any degree of certainty.<sup>36</sup> The argument of the role of RC as a linkage among the trinity, although politically attractive for many reasons, remains both dubious and unproven. Effective leaders able to reach a policy consensus among the political leadership or at least able to maintain consensus long enough to initiate an action on favorable terms possess power sufficient to take military action, including mobilization of reserve forces. Hence, as any belief that a cause and effect relationship exists between mobilizing the reserves and ensuring popular support should no longer be accepted as an act of faith, so too the idea that popular support is necessary prior to acting is equally without basis. To accept either of these arguments without new evidence of their validity serves no purpose in formulating future policy.

Related to the argument that the President must gain popular support prior to mobilizing the RC forces is that the AC dependence on RC mobilization was designed specifically to limit the ability of the President to commit the nation to war. Lewis Sorley, based on an interview that he conducted with then General (Retired) John Vessey in 1988, cites Vessey as the originator of the characterization of the Abrams Doctrine as being designed with “malice aforethought.”<sup>37</sup> He details what in Vessey’s belief was an unmistakable effort on the part of Abrams to tie the deployment of the AC to the mobilization of the RC to force the President to seek approval prior to acting. It is tough to argue with an authority like General (Retired) Vessey, although Dr. Crane raises doubts based on the time elapsed, the lack of any contemporary documents to support this assertion, the seriousness of formulating and disguising the intent of such an act, and the characterization of Abrams’ service made by James Schlesinger.<sup>38</sup> Correctly, Crane points out that:

Interpretations that the true motivation for the new force structure was purposefully concealed from civilian decision makers or that the justification was only created after the fact to preserve current policy are both troubling.<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of the intent, other attempts at restraining executive branch power, such as the Weinberger or Powell Doctrines and the War Powers Resolution, have had little impact on the exercise of Presidential discretion. As Jeffrey Record points out

...with the exception of Jimmy Carter, they [recent Presidents] have displayed a greater propensity to intervene in foreign civil wars than did their pre-Vietnam

predecessors. Reagan sent U.S. forces into Lebanon and Grenada. Bush intervened in Panama, the Philippines, and Somalia. And Clinton has intervened in Haiti and Bosnia. In none of these instances were fundamental U.S. security interests at stake or was a White House full-court press mounted to mobilize congressional and public opinion on behalf of intervention.<sup>40</sup>

Whether the Abrams Doctrine was intended in any way to curtail executive branch powers is actually moot. It clearly does not. But the lore associated with its design may be harmful.<sup>41</sup> Civilian leadership naturally would perceive such an effort to undermine civil-military relations as extremely disingenuous. However, available evidence would indicate that this perception of malice aforethought simply is not accurate.

#### THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE'S TRUE LEGACY?!

Abrams' intent has been misinterpreted and others have helped obscure the true legacy. The unseen and often overlooked brilliance of the Abrams Doctrine is not that it uses the RC as a forcing function in limiting the AC's commitment into an action, but in its leveraging the RC to get the AC out of an action. The use of RC may not cause the President to reconsider the initial commitment of forces when weighing matters of national defense. Nonetheless, with its presence in 2700 communities across all 54 states and territories, the mobilized and committed RC can certainly bring the political pressure of their elected representatives to bear to *end* a crisis that appears to be unsuccessful.<sup>42</sup>

General Abrams had witnessed the debilitating effects of nine years of feckless action in Vietnam both on the nation and on the Army. His World War II experiences probably helped him recognize the impact of the failure of introducing RC forces during the Vietnam War. Abrams' legacy may not be in preventing us from going into another Vietnam, but in ensuring a mobilized Reserve Component generates political focus commensurate with their representative community basing to prevent our remaining in such actions as a result of congressional inaction. This may be even more necessary with an all-volunteer AC force.

This interpretation changes Summers' assertion that "without the commitment of the American people the commitment of the Army to prolonged combat was impossible" to "with the commitment of the American people the commitment of the Army to prolonged *indecisive* combat *is* impossible."<sup>43</sup> Removing doubts about his motives, it reinforces Schlesinger's characterization of Abrams as the epitome of a "good servant."<sup>44</sup> If there is a forcing function imbedded in the design of the force structure engendered by the Abrams Doctrine, this conflict curtailing function may be it.

## THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE

Current international and domestic political pressures, although no less pressing, differ markedly from those of thirty years ago. Internationally, disappearance of the Soviet threat, declining defense budgets of traditional allies, public opposition to United States' policies by numerous international and transnational actors, the rise of transnational terrorism, and a hesitance of other nations to provide forces and access to assist the U.S. create a very different context for force planning.<sup>45</sup> The sometimes-public resentment of what formerly supportive countries now choose to interpret as unilateral or hegemonic actions by the United States is also causing a decrease in host nation and allied force support. International tensions are both lessened and exacerbated by domestic realities. Given these changes, the future of the Abrams Doctrine requires careful deliberation.

The original Abrams Doctrine was a landmark compromise marked by each constituency achieving some victories, accepting some losses, and the nation as a whole benefiting. The spirit of compromise that resulted in the first Abrams Doctrine must guide the development and serve as the enduring foundation for any future "Abrams" Doctrine. Abrams' intent, central to the compromise then and central to any compromise now, focused on AC-RC force structure balance within a constrained end-strength and on ensuring RC relevance. The associated perceptions, although they must be recognized as requiring management consideration, should be largely dismissed in structuring the force. In seeking a future "Abrams" Doctrine, the past provides a remarkable and applicable prologue.

## THE FUTURE AND FORCE BALANCE

Several factors now influencing the sizing debate may not be aligned as easily as those that faced Abrams in 1973. The success of the All-Volunteer Force now acts as a huge impediment towards any near-term or future growth of the active component. Regardless of sometimes-shrill cries by critics of a "poverty draft" or of questions surrounding future availability of a sufficiently qualified recruiting pool, the All Volunteer Force currently provides the necessary human raw material to fill the military's force structure.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the largest dampening factor in expanding the AC is personnel costs. Recruiting, training, retaining, and supporting the retirement of an active duty service member is extremely expensive. As defense budgets decline, personnel costs compete with modernization costs in each service's budget. Yet modernization costs continue to rise at incredible rates, prompting one defense industry executive to forecast that by 2054, the entire defense budget would be necessary to purchase a single aircraft.<sup>47</sup> This competition for defense dollars explains why the Secretary of Defense

was examining reduction of the AC army to just eight divisions as recently as 2001.<sup>48</sup> This same rationale also explains why Army and Department of Defense leadership remain opposed to recent Congressional efforts to raise the size of the army's Active Component by two divisions without a reasonable guarantee that additional funding for such an increase in force levels will be sustained for the foreseeable future.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, budgetary pressures to reduce the AC have led to increased reliance on the manpower of the RC. And critics maintain that in an effort to preserve the current ten divisions at all costs, the AC has now focused its modernization funds on its "core competency" of fighting and winning a conventional war and encouraged an increased RC role in stability and support operations.<sup>50</sup>

The renewed threat of transnational terror organizations and emerging first responder duties for RC forces make the sizing debate even more complex. In the past, the selected transfer of MOOTW critical capabilities between AC and RC (e.g., civil affairs, military police, and engineer vertical construction assets) went largely unnoticed domestically.<sup>51</sup> Today, however, as the deployment requirements for RC forces are contrasted with both disaster response and anticipated Homeland Security requirements, tensions are being felt throughout the AC and RC force structure and amongst state political leadership.<sup>52</sup> For example, skills now required by the AC may not be replaced in RC formations or may be replaced by skills that are not as easily recruited, retained, or utilized by the state authorities. Transfer of military police, medical, vertical construction, or civil affairs specialties are now very much noticed. As a result, when the Army's senior leadership openly discusses possibly transferring nearly 100,000 manpower spaces with these types of skills back into the AC force to fulfill the Secretary of Defense's rebalancing tasking, tensions rise.<sup>53</sup> Couple these pressures with those now being voiced over the extended and repetitive deployment of RC forces and with the higher casualty rates these forces are experiencing in Operation Iraqi Freedom's stability and support operations, and the pressures to reexamine the Reserve Component's role in overseas deployments vice homeland defense and security grow even more.<sup>54</sup>

Balancing AC and RC structure and capabilities between the current international and domestic environments in consideration of the National Security Strategy is admittedly a difficult proposition. An AC force supported by a three tiered RC (units earmarked, recruited, and retained specifically for expeditionary actions, homeland defense primarily, and homeland security respectively) has been suggested.<sup>55</sup> Eschewing reliance on divisions vice a brigade-based organization is another concept. Clearly, the AC must be able to accomplish its *immediate* missions without reliance on the RC. Just as clearly, the RC must possess a degree of redundancy of AC complementary capabilities as well as those unique supplementary

capabilities that are too little used or too expensive to retain in the AC. The total force must be structured not with a view towards combat operations solely, but across the entire spectrum of conflict.

Regardless of the solution, the fundamental linkage between Active and Reserve Component forces must be preserved in a new Abrams Doctrine. Both to ensure that mobilization of the RC can continue to act as a conflict-duration curtailing function, and in case an unforeseen and rapid expansion of the defense capabilities of the nation is required in the future. To preserve these capabilities, relevance of the future Reserve Component cannot be relegated to a secondary consideration.

#### THE FUTURE AND RESERVE COMPONENT RELEVANCE

Without the specter of a Soviet invasion of Europe, and following the failure to employ RC combat units during Desert Storm, the relevance of large portions of the RC had come under question. In 1997 the Quadrennial Defense Review did not even mention the specific utilization, integration, or modernization of the RC.

This was due primarily to the active component view of the National Guard combat units as a strategic reserve. In other words, the two major theater war scenario involved only the active component divisions. National Guard combat units would only be called upon in such a scenario if the conflict was not resolved within a specified time frame, or if active forces were required to redeploy to another conflict. Based on existing deployment practices, National Guard combat units would deploy to theater 45-60 days after mobilization, and would be committed only when the situation was under control. Basically, the National Guard was viewed as less "relevant" to future war fighting requirements.<sup>56</sup>

Largely driven by budgetary requirements, the AC allegedly attempted to relegate RC combat unit contributions to periods when control was established in an effort to avoid modernization costs.<sup>57</sup> This is a practical demonstration of how relevance translates to resources for the RC, and this rift developed into a fraternal bureaucratic fight of such particular ferocity that both the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the National Defense Panel commented adversely.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, the symbiotic relationship and RC relevance born and nurtured by the Soviet threat was fractured.

Relevance for the RC -- and the resources, retention, and recruiting that are its downstream effects -- must be a foundation of any future "Abrams" Doctrine. Structural relevance can be obtained by linking RC units to complementary AC capabilities, by including unique supplementary capabilities in the RC, or by assigning Homeland Defense or Homeland Security roles to the RC. Whatever missions or roles assigned to the RC, they must be inextricably integrated within the Total Force, and be directly related to the capabilities required

to face an accepted threat. Relegating a sizable portion of the RC to unlikely missions or seldom-used functions will destroy its relevance. By destroying its relevance, the subtle curtailing function it provides will be similarly destroyed, because unnecessary or seldom-used capabilities will not require mobilization.

#### THE SPIRIT OF THE ABRAMS DOCTRINE: THE WAY AHEAD

Simply retaining the Abrams Doctrine as originally designed is no longer feasible, but modification is preferred over discarding a policy that retains many desired qualities. Retention of a specified number of divisions must be subordinated to the required size and capabilities of the future force. Whether divisions or Brigade Combat Teams become the “coin of the realm” for measuring the size of the AC is not as important as ensuring that the capabilities required to project, sustain, and conduct combat operations sufficient to defeat the most likely enemies are retained. Directly related to this is redefining the desired role of the RC in direct support of the AC overseas, and in support of Homeland Defense and Homeland Security requirements. As all this is accomplished, the relevance of the Army’s Reserve Component to military mission accomplishment, achieved by the original Abrams Doctrine, cannot be placed in jeopardy.

Perceptions by some that structurally tying the deployment of the AC force to the RC’s capabilities creates or ensures the necessary level of popular support are myths. Structurally tying mobilization of the RC to employment of the AC has had little, if any, demonstrated effect on Presidential decision-making. With little -- if any -- real evidence to support them, the “malice of forethought” claims related to the Army’s supposedly insidious attempt to influence presidential power through a clever structural design should be refuted loudly. Nonetheless, when crafting a new “Abrams” Doctrine, all concerned should take particular care that the motivations, intent, and processes are visible and “transparent,” thereby avoiding the types of negative connotations that gain the military an array of academic and political critics for no sound reason.

However, the combat-duration curtailing function provided by encouraging political scrutiny of the actions of committed forces by the mobilized RC’s congressional representatives is a reality, and must be maintained. This function is a lesson ignored at considerable cost and peril, and may be more necessary with an all-volunteer force than with a draftee army.

That the Department of Defense and Army leadership has allowed this landmark compromise, the Abrams Doctrine, to exist *in name only* for the past dozen years was perhaps understandable given the changing nature of the international security environment. But fighting battles over roles and missions that were once defined by an ingenious compromise consumes

tremendous Army-internal leadership and bureaucratic energy. The current Secretary of Defense appears to be examining options for a new solution. But for a solution to be reached, a willingness to compromise must be exhibited by all parties. This will be possible only if the final goal is kept fully in mind, and only when all those creating other subordinate goals, developing personal agendas, or inserting personal priorities remember the following:

The only function of an army in a democratic society such as the United States is to serve the constituted power, that is the power the citizens themselves have created and in which they participate through constitutional channels. An army's function is not to serve itself, but its society.<sup>59</sup>

With this kept firmly in mind, the spirit of compromise that resulted in the first Abrams Doctrine must establish the foundation for the development of any future Abrams Doctrine.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Jacobs. "Lessons Lost?" *National Guard Magazine Online* March 2003 [journal on line]; Available from <<http://www.ngaus.org/ngmagazine/lessonslost303.asp>>; Internet; accessed 22 September 2003. Jacobs is one of several authors at NGAUS that are attacking Mr. Rumsfeld's policy initiative. He offers a vigorous argument relying on his own (and Sorley's) summation of the post-Vietnam events that led to the establishment of the Abrams Doctrine.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "Rebalancing Forces," memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Under Secretaries of Defense, (Washington, D.C.: The Pentagon, 9 July 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Pullen, "Keep The Reserves In The Fight" *Strategic Studies Institute Newsletter* October 2003. Available from <<http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/about/2003/sep/sep.htm>>; Internet; accessed 8 October 2003, and Lewis Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active Reserve Integration in Wartime," *Parameters* (Summer 1991): 35-50. Both offer a general summary of the benefits gained by the Reserve Component forces based on the Abrams Doctrine.

<sup>5</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine for Mobilization Planning*, Joint Pub 4-05, (Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, 22 June 1995), I4-I6. This publication illustrates the acceptance of the Abrams Doctrine. It states that the "Total Force Policy is one fundamental premise upon which our military force structure is built. It was institutionalized in 1973 and caused a shift of substantial military roles and missions to the RC along with resources necessary to maintain high levels of readiness, especially in units that are needed early in a crisis." Additionally, Lewis Sorley, in "Creighton Abrams and Active Reserve Integration in Wartime," 48, reflects that after the passage of years, the AC came to depend on the RC "so much so that it became an *article of faith* - as Abrams had planned--[that] the Army could not go to war without them." [Emphasis added]

<sup>6</sup> Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active Reserve Integration in Wartime," 45.

<sup>7</sup> Technically, the complete Total Force Policy was officially named for the then Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird. Over the years, perhaps because it had the greatest impact on and implications for the Army, it has become more common to simply refer to it as the "Abrams Doctrine."

<sup>8</sup> Simon Lunn, "Burden Sharing in NATO" *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Chatham House Papers #18 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1983): 15. Lunn discusses the potential advantages to the U.S. of the then resurging post-war Western European economies.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the army of his times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 365. Sorley provides an excellent summary of the political environment facing Abrams at the time. See also Richard Lock-Pullen, "An inward looking time": The United States Army, 1973-1976. *The Journal of Military History*, No 67 (April 2003), 483-512.

<sup>10</sup> Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the army of his times*, 365.

<sup>11</sup> Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active Reserve Integration in Wartime," 45-47. Sorley cites an interview he conducted with GEN (R) William DePuy where DePuy claimed to have conceived the "roundout" concept.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>13</sup> Joint Pub 4-05, IV-8.

<sup>14</sup> The statistics concerning the Army's deployment by sea are based on remarks made by a speaker participating in the Commandant's Lecture Series.

<sup>15</sup> Conrad C. Crane, *Avoiding Vietnam: The U.S. Army's Response to Defeat in Southeast Asia* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, September, 2002), 5. Dr. Crane bases his findings upon the contemporary sources located in Abrams' personal papers stored at the United States Army Military History Institute.

<sup>16</sup> Charles E. Heller, *Total Force: Federal Reserves And State National Guards* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, September, 1994), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Pullen, 2. Pullen discusses the necessity of relevancy in rebuilding (and indirectly, in maintaining) the Reserve Forces. Heller also covers this topic extensively from pages 30-35.

<sup>18</sup> *National Guard Posture Statement*, FY 2000, Appendix B: "Constitutional Charter of the Guard," 3, as quoted in Spencer W. Robinson, *The Role of the Army National Guard in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Peacekeeping Vs. Homeland Security* (Monterey: Naval Post Graduate School, December 2002), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Elliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 186.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, 204. Additionally, see F.G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force, The New American Way of War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 100-101, and Max Boot, *Savage Wars Of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 318-335.

<sup>21</sup> Crane, 5-6. Dr. Crane states that although Abrams' subordinates later claimed he also had a long-term vision to ensure that no president could ever fight another Vietnam without mobilization, that claim is neither clarified nor supported by available documents.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

<sup>23</sup> James O. Kievit and Thomas P. Murray, "Citizen Soldiers In A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Army At War," *Center for Strategic Leadership Issue Paper*, Vol 09-03 (October 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*. (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffman, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Summers, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Bassford and Edward J. Villacres, "Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity," reprinted from *Parameters* Autumn 1995, Available from <<http://www.clausewitz.com/CWZHOME/Trinity/TRININTR.htm>>; Internet; accessed 12 December 2003. In fact, Bassford and Villacres continue (on page 5) by suggesting that Summers' advocacy of a "social" trinity formed by the people, the government, and the army is such an alteration of Clausewitz's initial concept as to recommend it be referred to as the "Summersian trinity."

<sup>28</sup> Charles J. Gross, *American Military Aviation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Indispensable Arm* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 260.

<sup>29</sup> Humphrey Taylor, "Win in Kosovo And The Public Will Approve." *The Wall Street Journal* (Jun 3, 1999): A26 [database on line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 14 December 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Guenter Lewy, *America In Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 43.

<sup>31</sup> Hoffman, 32.

<sup>32</sup> James Burk, "Public support for peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the casualties hypothesis," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol 114, Iss. 1 (Spring 1999): 2 [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 14 December 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 5, 12. He summarizes Eric V. Larsen's argument from *Casualties and Consensus* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1996). See also Boot 327-330.

<sup>34</sup> Boot, 329.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, 204.

<sup>36</sup> If nothing else, Alan Beyerchen's discussion of Clausewitz's writings with respect to nonlinearity illustrates these points rather adeptly. See Alan Beyerchen, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security*, 17:3 (Winter, 1992), 59-90.

<sup>37</sup> Sorley, "Creighton Abrams and Active Reserve Integration in Wartime," 45.

<sup>38</sup> Crane, 5 and 21.

<sup>39</sup> Crane, 20-21.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Record, *The Creeping Irrelevance of U.S. Force Planning* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 19 May 1998), 10.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Elliot Cohen (among other scholars) has noted: "This was, nonetheless an extraordinary effort by the military to limit the choices available to their civilian masters, to tie the hands of policymakers through the seemingly technical manipulation of organizational structures." Cohen, 186.

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, 19. Robinson is used to cite the number of communities and states/territories. See also Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), 442 for his discussion of constant political audit.

<sup>43</sup> Summers, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Crane, 5.

<sup>45</sup> This is predominantly general knowledge, but these ideas are themes gathered from the in-class discussions of Seminar 7, United States Army War College, during Academic Year 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Claire Shaeffer-Duffy, "Uncle Sam Hustles to keep the ranks filled," *National Catholic Review Online* [journal on line]; available from <[http://www.natcath.com/NCR\\_Online/archives/032103/032103a/htm](http://www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/archives/032103/032103a/htm)>; Internet; accessed 30 December 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Stan Crock, "Less Bang from the Pentagon's Bucks" *Business Week Online* 29 March 2002 [journal on line]; available from <[http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/mar2002/nf20020329\\_9065.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/mar2002/nf20020329_9065.htm)>; Internet; accessed 6 February 2004. Crock cites a comment attributed to Norman R. Augustine, referred to anecdotally as "Augustine's Law." It states that in 1983, Lockheed Martin Chairman and CEO Augustine looked at the trajectory of per-unit costs for jet fighters and the trajectory of increases in the defense budget and formulated something he dubbed "the First Law of Impending Doom or the Final Law of Economic Disarmament." He [Augustine] wrote back then: "In the year 2054, the entire defense budget will purchase just one aircraft. This aircraft will have to be shared by the Air Force and Navy 3 1/2 days each per week except for leap year, when it will be made available to the Marines for the extra day."

<sup>48</sup> David Pyne, "New Army Brigade Plan is Dangerous" *Military.Com* (5 November 2003) [journal on line]; available from <[http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,Defensewatch\\_110503\\_Brigade,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,Defensewatch_110503_Brigade,00.html)>; Internet; accessed 6 February 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Garamone, "Army Chief 'Adamantly Opposes' Added End Strength," *Defense Link* (29 January 2004) [journal on line]; available from <[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2004/n01282004\\_200410288.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2004/n01282004_200410288.html)>; Internet; accessed 6 February 2004. Garamone, writing for the Armed Force Information Service, was one of many who cited the Army's concern with Congress giving the "military an unfunded order - meaning that the service must take the money from other areas to fund the requirement."

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, 57-59.

<sup>51</sup> Record, 21

<sup>52</sup> As an example, see Mike Madden, "Mobilization for Iraq hits W. Va., Kentucky hard" *The Herald Dispatch* (27 February 2003) [journal on line]; available from <<http://www.hdonline.com/2003/February/27/Lnspt.htm>>; Internet; accessed 7 November 2003.

<sup>53</sup> This comment is based on remarks made by a speaker participating in the Commandant's Lecture Series.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Burns, "Most U.S. Iraq Deaths Are Reservists." *Comcast News* (1 January 2004) [journal on line]; available from <[http://www.comcast.net/News/DOMESTIC//XML/1107\\_AP\\_Online\\_regional\\_Middle East](http://www.comcast.net/News/DOMESTIC//XML/1107_AP_Online_regional_Middle East)>; Internet; accessed 1 January 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Gold and Erin Solaro, "Wrecking ...and fixing the Reserves." *Washington Times*, 15 October 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson, 49.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Cincinnatus. *Self Destruction: The Disintegration And Decay Of The United States Army During The Vietnam Era*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1981), 44. This book, because its views represent a very different view of both the Army as an institution and of the actions of the officer corps in Vietnam should be required reading for every officer.



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